



## Emotional education as second language acquisition?

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In this paper we argue that while emotional education intervention packages offer certain advantages, there are risks associated with their uncritical use. The main risk is that if the unwanted behaviour of some pupils is seen merely as a problem that can be dealt with through targeted intervention, then important, identity constitutive parts of their reality might become obscured. We reconsider sociological explanations of school disaffection, along with more recent sociological and philosophical attempts to explore the emotional aspect of schooling. We hypothesise that some of the challenging behaviour exhibited by young people in schools is *solution seeking*; that it is a functional adaptation to an essentially foreign emotional environment. We conclude that attempts to educate the emotions should aim to develop morally rich virtues rather than empty intelligences.

**Keywords:** social, emotional and behavioural difficulties    emotional intelligence  
emotional virtue

### Introduction

There are two different but related arguments advanced in this paper. Firstly, although emotional education intervention packages offer certain advantages, there are risks associated with their uncritical use. The main risk is that if the unwanted behaviour of some pupils is seen merely as a *problem* that can be dealt with through targeted intervention, then important, identity constitutive parts of their reality might become obscured. It is possible to hypothesise that some of the challenging behaviour exhibited by young people in schools might be *solution seeking*; that it might be a functional adaptation on their part to an essentially foreign emotional environment. Moreover, if teachers were to rely indiscriminately on emotional education interventions, the probability that some challenging behaviour is a necessary expression of young people's culture and personhood might be concealed. In this respect, we will argue, young people can be seen as negotiating different emotional languages appropriate for different contexts. We shall reconsider sociological explanations of school disaffection, along with more recent sociological and philosophical attempts to explore the emotional aspect of schooling.

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The second and related argument, which draws on the writings of Aristotle, makes the case that the development of virtues ought to be at the heart of emotional education. This alternative approach does not, of course, obviate the need to take into account the cultural context of the pupils. Rather, we argue that social and emotional learning packages will be at their most effective when they combine the sensitivity required by the first argument with a focus on the development of moral virtues. Whilst these arguments apply to the social and emotional learning of all pupils, we believe they are particularly relevant to the education of young people who are identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).

It has recently been observed that educational research is not cumulative (Hargreaves 2007). Unlike medical research in which studies are replicated with the intention of building on existing knowledge, one of the defining characteristics of educational research is that there is a plethora of small-scale studies that exist largely in isolation. In this paper, therefore, we make no apology for presenting a line of argument that builds upon existing research and seeks to add weight to accumulated bodies of evidence relating to young people experiencing SEBD in the school setting. The terms behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and SEBD are used interchangeably in the literature. The authors prefer the latter term, as it appears that the overt behavioural and emotional difficulties manifested by some young people are largely formed in social environments. This article draws on data generated as part of a research project funded by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF 2009). Its claims to generalisability rest on the extent to which it supports and develops existing understanding rather than on the size or representativeness of the sample of 24 young people.

Hargreaves (2007) pointed to a number of weaknesses in educational research, including the tendency for educational researchers to engage in lengthy debates about methodology and for fashions in theory to come and go with little sign of development. Indeed it is little wonder that postmodernist ideas found such fertile ground in educational research circles, as they provide a justification for the pursuit of research in this piecemeal manner. Over a decade ago, the introduction to a special edition of the *British Educational Research Journal* announced that 'post-modernism and post-structuralism have finally hit education, though they have been used by the social sciences for a decade or more' (Paechter and Weiner 1996, 267). Ironically, this 'discovery' by education in the late 1990s came at around the same time as postmodernism was becoming less influential in other disciplines within the social sciences (Potter and Lopez 2001).

This paper calls for a return to analyses of schooling that take a modernist approach, and view schools as sites of social and cultural re/production and as locations of conflict. However, this return to modernist explanations will not proceed as if nothing was achieved by the postmodern turn. The analysis proposed also pays attention to the experiences of individuals as they navigate schooling, and to the processes of identity formation. It draws on the work of Furlong (1991), who advocated paying attention to the individual psychology of the pupils' school experience.

## **School disaffection**

Furlong (1991) noted that while many educational researchers preferred sociological explanations, policy-makers and practitioners found psychological perspectives more convincing. In part he attributed this to weaknesses in sociological accounts at the time. These were considered by some to be irrelevant to policy and overly simplistic. It was also argued that such sociological interpretations did not give due regard to potentially salient psychological factors. At any event, the tangible divide between research and practice persists (Hargreaves 2007), and psychological research continues to predominate. This dichotomy is particularly evident in the area of SEBD, attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) where the trend to 'medicalise' disruptive behaviour (Kristjánsson 2009) has tended to overshadow sociological explanations from policy discussions and interventions. One must mention however, that recently the biopsychosocial perspective has been gaining considerable ground in developing understandings which draw on both medical and social understandings of development, behaviour and disability. Paul Cooper's biopsychosocial model which attempts to develop an understanding of SEBD and ADHD by drawing on biological, psychological and socio-cultural insights, has become well established in the academic world (Cooper 2005, 2008). The biopsychosocial approach is in itself highly influenced by social systems theory, which continues to be influential in sociology. It also draws on social psychological constructs from symbolic interactionism, which have also been important in shaping sociology as a discipline. More than anything, the biopsychosocial approach challenges monistic approaches to SEBD. Cooper (2008) argues against linear theories, be they biological, psychological or sociological, in favour of an holistic synthesis which attempts to capture the ways in which biological, psychological and social factors interact.

Furlong (1991) considered that school deviance might be better understood if research drew upon both social and psychological factors. He argued that '[r]ejecting schooling is nearly always a strongly emotional experience' (1991, 296), and that therefore sociological theories needed to develop a better understanding of the emotional response to schooling. In particular, Furlong argued that it was necessary to consider how educational structures are encountered and experienced by pupils. In so doing, he called for a move away from the view that pupils who reject or resist school do so as a result of a rational decision-making process following an encounter with an abstract social structure. Furlong instead used structures to describe the 'ways in which we use power to construct young people in school' (1991, 299) and noted that the young people in schools were often not fully aware of these structures.

For Furlong, the starting point was to examine the ways in which ability, values and occupational identity are produced in schools, for example through organisational factors, pedagogy and the hidden curriculum. These create something that pupils will feel themselves to come up against to different degrees, depending on their own individual biographies and personalities. For some pupils the experience of encountering these structures will involve hurt, distress and anger.

Of course not all pupils will respond in this way, and some pupils are much more likely to have a negative emotional response than others. How pupils respond to schooling will depend on a number of factors.

Those who are dealing with emotionally difficult situations at home or in the community might find themselves with lower reserves for coping with emotional injury at school. Some young people are more resilient to school and the ‘butting up’ against these constructions/ productions. Factors said to help develop such resilience in young people are friendships, good relationships with parents, ‘connectedness’ to others, emotional and social competence (Howard and Johnson, 2000; Cefai 2007; Knight 2007). Much recent work developing interventions in ‘emotional intelligence’, ‘emotional literacy’ and so on has been in direct response to research that has suggested developing these attributes as a way of fostering resilience (Weare 2004).

Studies focusing on the psychology of the individual suggest that pupils will respond in different ways to the educational structures they encounter. Sociological analyses highlight the point that the chances of a pupil coming up against these structures will vary with factors such as class, ethnicity and gender. Such analyses take as their starting point the uncontested, international, and long-established evidence that children from poorer families are more likely to get into trouble at school (Hargreaves 1967; Ball 1981; Fergusson et al. 1994; Bear 1998; Chazan 2000). There are different explanations for the link between social class background and being identified as having behavioural difficulties in school. Some focus on the resistance of pupils to the reproduction of social inequality that is considered to be a purpose of schooling (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Others have found this too deterministic and have emphasised the active role taken by pupils in cultural production (Willis 1977). For others the resistance offered by pupils is not to the ‘dominant ideology of society’ (MacFadden 1995) but to the curriculum and pedagogy which they encounter. Yet others offer a simpler explanation, namely that pupils from backgrounds that are different from the middle-class school will experience cultural conflict (Miller 1958). This idea of ‘cultural conflict’ or ‘cultural mismatch’ has more recently been taken up as an explanation for the over-representation of African American students on measures of school indiscipline (Monroe 2005). However, it is important not to conflate the argument that a particular group has different values from those of the school with the assertion that a particular group can be characterised as having anti-school values (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998).

The social and individual processes at work here are clearly very complex. However, our central argument is that schools are generally places in which young people are ‘produced’ and expected to conform and adapt themselves to a range of behavioural and emotional norms. Moreover, we think that this process of production can be a very difficult experience for some pupils as their *personal emotional structures* come into conflict with those more impersonal structures prevalent in schools. As a result these young people are likely to be identified as having SEBD. Practitioners may regard them as deliberately choosing to reject school or as vulnerable children who find it difficult to cope. Whether it is possible to identify such distinct groups is open to question (Macleod 2006). However, these are all young people who find the experience of schooling emotionally challenging to the point where they exhibit behaviour that is construed as troublesome or troubling.

### **What else is constructed in schools? Findings from a study of permanently excluded young people**

Furlong (1991) focused on the production of ability, values and occupational identity but he acknowledged that schools are the sites of the production of much more. One way of exploring the kinds of productive educational structures in schools today is to examine the accounts of young people who have found schooling to be an emotionally hurtful experience. By exploring their frustrations, discomforts and injury we can perhaps make inferences about the emotional structures in play in today's schools. This approach is also consistent with the insightful philosophy of emotion advanced by Goldie (2000). Goldie (2000) argued that emotions can only be fully understood if attention is paid to how individuals perceive the world around them, including the different values that they encounter in different contexts.

Data gathered in the course of conducting research exploring outcomes for pupils who had been permanently excluded from alternative provision, including special schools, suggested that a particular educational structure, relationships between adults and young people, was causing problems for the young people in the study. The details of the research project have been described elsewhere (Pirrie and Macleod 2009a; Pirrie and Macleod 2009b, Macleod and Pirrie 2010). The three-year longitudinal project followed 24 young people who had been permanently excluded in the school year 2005-2006. The research team conducted interviews with the young people and significant adults (mainly parents and service providers). The profile of the young people was as predicted from previous research in terms of age, gender, 'looked after' status and ethnicity (Brodie 2000; Munn and Lloyd 2005; Parsons 2005). Most of the young people lived in families characterised by an interaction of two or more of the following: mental ill-health, unemployment, family breakdown and poverty. All of the young people had multiple and complex support needs and many were considered by the service providers to be at the extreme end of a spectrum of need.

The purpose of the research was to explore what happened to the young people in the sample after their permanent exclusion from school. Particular attention was paid to where they were living, the educational support they received and how they and their families regarded the process of exclusion. During the semi-structured interviews all respondents were asked to reflect upon the educational history of the young person from the early stages of schooling. Therefore, although uncovering productive educational structures was not an aim of the study, data were generated which can address this issue. Indeed the stories that the young people told about their experiences in schools came as no surprise to the research team, as they resonated with the findings from many other studies (e.g. Cooper 1993; Wise 1997; Jahnukainen 2001; Cefai and Cooper, 2009b).

The themes that emerged were a lack of respect from teachers; a sense of frustration at school work which they considered too easy, too difficult or irrelevant; frustration with the authority systems in schools in which they felt they had no voice; marginalisation and being treated unfairly. These issues were significant, to varying degrees, for almost all of the young people to whom we spoke. However, for a sizeable group of the young people the issues of respect, and response to authority were particularly important. The experiences of four of them are reported here.

## Bill

Bill was 13 at the start of the study, living part of the time with his mum and part of the time with his dad and receiving his education in a local library from an outreach teacher for 4 hours a week. His home life was described by his Youth Offending Team worker as 'difficult'. There were addiction problems in the family, a high level of socio-economic deprivation and frequent moves between temporary accommodation. Bill was frustrated that he wasn't getting the teaching he wanted in key skills so that he could go to college to learn something useful. He was spending the rest of his time working for a family friend on a building site where he got on well with the other men and earned some money. Bill said he had been excluded from mainstream school after an incident with a teacher in which he refused to back down:

I was walking down a corridor and a teacher was walking towards me...and that was stupid, I didn't move out of the way, I just carried on walking, and he could have been polite and let me through. I, we just glided like, with our shoulders...and he went to the headteacher and said I assaulted him. He got me done for assault and that's why I got kicked out.

Bill was subsequently excluded from alternative provision in what he described as an unfair targeting of him by staff after a minor incident. Two and a half years later Bill was in college working towards a number of qualifications including a diploma in painting and decorating and an Information Technology certificate. His attendance was very good (close to 100%) and he said he had people he could talk with if he needed to.

Here they treat me like an adult. They're upfront with you. Other places don't treat you with respect. Especially schools treat you like a kid where here they treat you like an adult. You get respect and you give respect.

Bill's Youth Offending Team worker described him as having an '*adult head on young shoulders*' and said that he was articulate and easy to talk to. His Curriculum Support Worker at college said '*he's just one of those kids that doesn't fit in schools you know, because the teachers are scared of them, but he's a pussycat he really is*'. In the Statement of Special Educational Needs written in 2006 Bill was described by the Educational Psychologist as '*capable of being co-operative, polite, thoughtful and respectful. However he's also capable of extreme aggressive and abusive behaviour towards peers and adults.*'

## Steven

Steven was one of the youngest pupils in the study. He had first come to the attention of the local inclusion team in Year 3 when he was 6 years old and was placed in alternative provision when he was 8. Two years later Steven was permanently excluded for carrying a knife and was then placed in a local mainstream primary school. In the initial interview Steven appeared to be trying to present himself as much older and more 'streetwise' than his years. He talked about all the girls who were 'after him', how he had deliberately caused the permanent exclusion and was generally in control of the world around him, and about his friendships with key players in the local gangs. Meanwhile, the adults around him were expressing concern that he was

extremely vulnerable. By the end of the study Steven had moved into mainstream secondary but his placement there was tenuous. His school support worker explained that *'he's one of the most at risk of being permanently excluded, he is on his last legs right now'*.

His primary headteacher thought that, at least in part, Steven's problems at school stemmed from the dynamics at home. She said he *'gets treated like the man of the house and doesn't know how to talk to adults in school'*. She went on to predict *'he's the big I am, but he's full of bravado, it's all for show, one day he'll get caught up with older boys who really are streetwise and he'll not know what's hit him'*. Steven's mum was also concerned with his relationships outside school. There was a lot of gang activity in the local area and Steven wanted to be with much older children. His mentor in secondary school described him as not being violent but hard to control and disruptive: *'he's just randomly doing what he wants to do, not following the rules'*. By the time of the last interview Steven had just returned from a five-day exclusion after intimidating behaviour towards a teacher.

### *Mark*

Mark had been permanently excluded from a special school when he was 14 as a result of a very violent assault on another pupil. The headteacher of the school said *'the rest of the children were extremely frightened and he could not come back, he had a lot of power amongst his peer group'*. His form tutor at the same school said:

he turned nasty, got in with a bad crowd outside school, got involved with gangs, his only interest was becoming a gangster and there was no way for me to get to him because he'd made up his mind he was living the life of a gangster

After his permanent exclusion Mark was out of education until he started college just over a year later. Mark's behaviour was seen by professionals, such as his family liaison officer, as a direct consequence of a breakdown in the structure of his family, including the death of two grandparents who seemed to have played a key role in his life. One of the professionals explained that *'it appeared that it just broke down at home and he was just left, to almost, like, survive'*. Mark's Connections Personal Assistant [1] described him as *'quite powerful in the family now, but oddly also quite like a frightened little boy too'*. Mark appeared to have a strong sense of himself as standing his ground and not allowing himself to be taken advantage of: *'everyone knows that I've got a limit and obviously, if you push my limit then I'm gonna turn around and swing at you or something'*. He went on to explain that he and his friends were treated unfairly and told the researcher *'so that's why I used to take the law into my own hands'*.

### *Isaac*

Isaac was serving a 13-month sentence in a Young Offenders Institution when the research team located his whereabouts. His first permanent exclusion had occurred when he was still in primary school. The exclusion that was the criterion for admission to the study was from a special school for boys with SEBD. The

catalyst for this exclusion, which occurred when he was 14, was knife carrying. However, Isaac had been persistently disruptive and had engaged in severe bullying of younger children ever since his arrival in the school, over a year previously. His attendance was very poor, and he spent a lot of time on the street where he became involved in petty crime, mainly burglary and theft, but later he committed an assault on a police officer while resisting arrest. Isaac had no alternative script: he had no experience of boundaries or living within rules. He had a history of substance abuse, and very poor literacy skills. Despite his defiant attitude he displayed vulnerability when the researcher raised the issue of where he would live following his release from prison.

Of course schools have to have rules and expectations. They cannot be places where young people turn up and do as they like. Many are large institutions trying to organise the learning experiences (and movement around campus, feeding, and exercising) of sometimes more than 1000 young people. It is difficult to see how schools (on this scale) could be significantly different. It is important to recognise that due to these constraints schools produce particular kinds of relationships between pupils and staff.

It is with this aspect of schooling – the production of appropriate attitudes to authority - that many young people who are identified as experiencing SEBD come into conflict. Bill, Steven, Mark and Isaac and many other young people like them are navigating the world of school and their world outside school which is often disrupted, frightening, and unpredictable. As Mark's family liaison worker put it, they have to *survive*, and in many cases that involves being streetwise, tough, commanding respect and being in control – or at least putting on a good show. Experience has taught these young people that when everyone else lets you down you have only yourself to rely on. You have to, as Mark did 'take the law into your own hands'.

### **Social and emotional learning and Aristotelian virtue**

The difficulty that some young people have in living up to schools' expectations of demonstrating deference to authority, obedience, and respect is well known, and is familiar to teachers not just in the UK. In recent years social and emotional learning has come to be seen as a main element in schools' approaches to dealing with this issue. As Osher et al. (2010, 50) observed, 'two universal approaches to schoolwide discipline have predominated during the past decade: schoolwide positive behavioural supports....[and]... social emotional learning...'. Social and emotional learning is one of a number of terms in current use, others being emotional literacy (Weare 2004), emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996) and emotional education (Cefai and Cooper 2009a). All of these concepts are relatively recent arrivals. The origins of the earliest, emotional intelligence, is generally traced to an article by Salovey and Mayer (1990), although the work of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences is also seen as a key part of the history of the idea (Gardner 1983).

Emotional literacy is 'the ability to recognize, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions' (Sharp 2001, 1). The key idea, that alongside academic intelligence the ability to regulate one's emotions is a central predictor of success in learning and in life, has quickly become established as a 'truth' of education and is currently riding the 'crest of a popular wave' (Kristjánsson 2006). For example, the UK government



includes Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) as a key element in the inclusion strand of the National Strategies. SEAL is said to encompass self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills (DCSF 2005).

The claims being made on behalf of emotional literacy and related concepts are impressive. Not only is it good for the self-development of the individual and supportive of their academic learning, it is also said to be good for the community as a whole (Cefai and Cooper 2009a). Carnwell and Baker (2007) summarised the evidence base regarding the outcomes of school-based programmes and identified improved behaviour, improved academic performance, reduced rates of drug, tobacco use and violence as the main benefits. Given the *prima facie* promise offered by such interventions, it is not surprising that they have generated a loyal following in a profession that is constantly seeking the answer to ‘what works?’ in relation to indiscipline in schools.

However, the emotional intelligence movement has not been without its critics. A key challenge has come from philosophy of education (Carr 2002; Kristjánsson 2006). It seems pertinent to note some of the main points of dispute. First is the problem of definition. As Carr observed, ‘it is difficult to discern in literature of this genre any very coherent or unified account of the key notion of emotional intelligence’ (Carr 2002, 8). Carr (2002) notes that various definitions are suggested in the literature: it is sensitivity to the emotions of others; or it denotes knowledge about emotions; or it is the ability to control feelings through the exercise of reason. Kristjánsson (2006) had a similar concern; he remained unconvinced that emotional intelligence has been clearly specified and delineated from other existing related constructs. Both Carr and Kristjánsson also questioned the validity of Goleman’s attempt to provide credence to emotional intelligence by grounding it in neuroscience. Carr (2002) pointed out that even if such a neurophysiological basis could be substantiated (and there are people attempting to do just this, e.g. Krueger et al. 2009), finding a causal link between brain function and emotional state does not get us any closer to *understanding* emotional life. However, the main point of contention for Kristjánsson seems to be the extent to which emotional intelligence, particularly as described by Goleman, can rightly be said to derive from Aristotelian views on emotional virtue. Goleman’s account of *how* emotions are intelligent does not accurately reflect the subtlety of Aristotle’s account, as Goleman does not ‘make any substantive moral demands on the content of intelligent emotions’ (Kristjánsson 2006, 53).

In the opening book of *Nichomachean Ethics* (NE) Aristotle argued that the end of human life is long-term happiness or *eudaimonia* which is ‘a radically moralised notion’ (Kristjánsson 2006, 45). Aristotle thought that lasting flourishing depended on the development and consistent exercise of character traits he called virtues. He broadly classified his moral virtues as excellent dispositions of thought, action and *feeling*. For the purposes of the line of argument pursued here, it is significant that in both the Rhetoric (Rhet.) and Ethics (NE), Aristotle made clear his view that emotions can be intelligent responses to the environments in which we find ourselves. In fact he defined the emotions as alterations of judgement (Rhet.1378a20-23). Aristotle’s theory suggests that emotions both furnish us with an understanding of, and are shaped by, our

particular circumstances (Sherman 1989; Striker, 1996). As Striker puts it, emotions can direct ‘one’s attention to the practically or morally relevant features of a situation’ (Striker 1996, 298). Although emotions themselves are not virtues, particular instances of emotion can be indicative of virtue if a person’s life is viewed as a whole.

Goldie (2000) also argued that one can best make sense of particular feelings and moods by viewing them as episodes *structured* by a larger narrative of emotion that unfolds over the length of life. He stressed that particular episodes of emotion are responses to the world as we now experience it rather than rigid dispositions. However, he also inferred that some emotional responses can become so embedded in our character that they can continue to influence action and behaviour. We think it is possible that some disaffected pupils have acquired relatively enduring emotional responses that allow them to adapt successfully to their home environments. It can be argued that the home and school environments of some of these young people are so profoundly at odds that the emotions that routinely serve them well in their lives outside school fundamentally clash with the emotions, actions and behaviours expected of them in school. Moreover, we remain unconvinced that unreflective use of emotional intelligence interventions can help disaffected pupils to become better accommodated to more impersonal school structures, not least because a painful and negative emotion like anger can be ‘intelligent’ yet not understood by either teacher or pupil.

Whilst emotional intelligence interventions may lead young people to develop ‘functional’ responses (specifically those which are acceptable within the school context), the focus on ‘controlling’ emotion removes the opportunity for individuals to feel and experience emotion. The extent to which such approaches emphasise the control and suppression of emotions over the feeling of the emotion will of course vary. The many programmes which advocate ‘counting to ten’ and other impulse control strategies are clearly aligning themselves more with Goleman and developing emotional intelligence not emotional virtue. Whilst these may allow an emotional response, the emphasis is on management and control and not on the experience of the emotion itself.

The emotionally intelligent person need only rationally control his or her feelings to ensure a certain ‘emotional tranquillity’ (Kristjánsson 2006). The emotionally virtuous person in contrast must experience their feelings in due measure according to the circumstances in which they find themselves. For Goleman (1996) the intelligent response to a painful and negative emotion like anger consisted in the rational suppression or sublimation of the felt experience. Aristotle in contrast conceded that a degree of emotional conflict might be expressive of virtue. He argued that people can have a *good disposition towards anger* if they feel it neither too strongly nor weakly but moderately (NE1105b25-29). He famously stated that the virtuous person would at times act out of, and feel angry towards the right things or people to the proper degree (NE, 1125B30-32). Although emotional intelligence interventions might promote the character trait that Aristotle described as *cleverness*, they do not seem likely to help pupils develop the more desirable virtue of *practical wisdom* (Kristjánsson 2006). Though cleverness and practical wisdom both require a combination of intelligent thought and feeling, the ends at which the respective states aim are radically different. Whereas cleverness

only requires that a person's goals be *successfully* reached, wisdom requires that the goals themselves be *morally correct* (NE 1144a23-1144b). The young people from the study are arguably very emotionally adept and *clever* when measured against four domains of emotional intelligence as suggested by Goleman (2002).

### *Self-awareness*

Isaac is only too aware of the difficult future that lies ahead of him. Steven knows how tenuous his placement in mainstream has become and of the consequences for his mother (having to give up work) if he is permanently excluded. This knowledge seems to be part of what is making him stay just on the right side of the line. Bill knows he has a temper and that it gets him into trouble at times. The difficulty for these young men is not that they don't know how they feel, but that they often don't feel good.

### *Self-management*

All four of the young men described above know how to handle themselves in their home contexts. Bill was passing as competent work-mate on the building site; Mark was living up to his aspirations as a gangster in the making. In terms of their ability to motivate themselves towards a goal, despite set-backs, the young people in the study are shining examples of triumph over adversity. The necessity of relying on themselves from an early age may have led to choices which 'the system' would rather they hadn't made, but having made them these young men are actively, independently, and often, by their criteria, successfully pursuing their goals.

### *Social awareness*

All of the young people talk about key members of their families (though not always parents) and their sense of responsibility towards them. While Mark was causing havoc at school he was taking on caring responsibilities at home. Isaac has a child whom he rarely sees, partly due to his custodial placement being a long way from home. He is painfully aware of the likely long-term outcomes for his child.

### *Relationship management*

Both Isaac and Mark are managing their 'gang member' identity successfully. Bill had friends on the worksite and Steven's increasing involvement with local gangs is a cause for concern for his mother, but not for him. The ways in which they manage their relationships (in Mark's case through fear) and the people they choose to associate with might not be ideal, but they are all successfully embedded into social networks of their choosing.

## **Limitations of social and emotional learning as an intervention for pupils with SEBD**

We conclude this paper by briefly considering the possibility that episodes of heightened emotion might actually themselves be a form of language, expressive of inner conflict. Moreover, these are conflicts

that might be necessary for the wider development and moral formation of the person experiencing them. There may be much good work being done in schools in the name of emotional education. However, our analysis suggests that more thinking is required in relation to emotional education as a solution for young people experiencing SEBD. We have shown that as measured against understandings of emotional intelligence that are based on lists of competencies, the young men in the study have high levels of emotional *cleverness*. The problem is not that these young people are emotionally illiterate (and indeed many are functionally illiterate). In fact many practitioners talk about the exceptional levels of awareness and emotional sensitivity of the young people they work with who come from backgrounds that are similar to those of the young people in this study. What many of these young people have is highly developed emotional intelligence that has developed over years as a survival mechanism. This has led to the development of particular behaviours, attitudes, and ways of being which enable the individual to navigate their life outside of school. In many cases these behaviours, attitudes and identities coalesce into anti-authoritarian, disrespectful, and apparently hyper-confident personas.

The potential risk in emotional intelligence packages is that they see emotions that are overtly painful and negative as *problematic*. These same emotions however, might represent attempts by pupils to *resolve* inner conflict, and they might constitute an important part of their identity. Therefore it is important that teachers have an understanding of the personal emotional structures of young people, as these structures might help to explain the function of behaviour which others perceive as challenging. Emotional education packages which lean towards ‘intelligence’ rather than ‘virtue’ models imply a view of pupils as having a deficit, an inability to control their emotions. What we are suggesting is that it may be more helpful to think of them as highly literate in their native emotional language. Different languages are appropriate in different contexts, and different emotional responses and actions can be successful in different settings. We believe that the emotional intelligence that these young people already possess is in some cases crucial to their ability to ‘pass’ in their world outside of school. By challenging it directly, schools run a number of risks, including emotional hurt to the pupil. However, schools would not be carrying out one of their key functions – that of preparing pupils for life in wider society – if they did not point out to their pupils that different emotional languages are ‘spoken’ in different social settings. Therefore there is a need for schools to educate pupils about different emotional languages. Grasp of their native language may enable young people to accommodate successfully to their out-of-school contexts, but elements of their resulting emotional structures may not be morally justifiable.

We accept that schools are necessarily sites of social, emotional and behavioural production. However, we also believe that rightly-conceived production is morally desirable. It appears that some emotional intelligence programmes might actually compound and entrench some of the less than praiseworthy aims, actions and choices of the young people. Cleverness is for example, a morally empty trait that could be reinforced by uncritical implementation of emotional intelligence packages. The programmes may also encourage young people to *suppress* emotions where *expression* might otherwise lead to personal

development. We do not think that such suppression is desirable for *any* pupil; we rather endorse Aristotle's view that a degree of emotional conflict is entirely proper. We advocate an approach to emotional education that focuses on the development of moral virtues rather than emotional cleverness. We also argue that any approach to emotional education (intelligence or virtues) ought to take account of the experiences that young people bring with them into school. We also take the view that disaffected pupils might find the expectation to control conflict in a rational manner to be particularly alienating. Sensitivity to the experiences of young people outside school and recognition of the attitudes and emotional structures that they have already developed, would be a good first step towards making emotional education interventions less threatening for those who present challenging behaviour. More than most, it is the disaffected that should be encouraged to search rather than rig their hearts.

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